



Maria Todorova, Ph.D.

Professor of History

University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Born in 1949 in Sofia, Bulgaria

Studied History at the University of Sofia

PROJECT

Balkan National Heroes and Their Symbology

This is an extension of my present project on the major figure of the Bulgarian national pantheon, Vasil Levski. With a focus on national memories and identities in the Balkans, I concentrate on the symbology of nationalism and the mechanisms of hero worship, in order to understand the role of cultural processes and artifacts in the formation of national identity. In engaging the scholarship on nationalism, I wish to contribute to both problematizing and refining its typology by introducing and elaborating on a new category, that of weak nationalism. By critically employing recent work on historical memory, I expect to develop a more concrete understanding of how people experience the past and how the past can mobilize them politically.

Remembering Communism

With its emphasis on memory, this project is methodologically linked to the previous one. Prompted by a critical attitude toward transitology and the state of interpretations of actually-lived communism, it seeks to address how communism is remembered today in view of contributing to the better understanding of the legacy of a past system that shaped the everyday lives of people over several generations. By focusing on the process of remembering, it lays stress on three facets: the constant and consecutive rearticulations of the communist experience; lived experience as inflected by the exigencies of the present moment at which the act of recollection takes place; and finally, by exploring the links between individual memories and shared knowledge, as well as the creation of existential normality, it puts a premium on subjectivity. In its broad contours, this is a long-term international and interdisciplinary collaborative project, which at present is beginning as a pilot study in Bulgaria.

Recommended Reading

Todorova, Maria. *Balkan Family Structure and the European Pattern: Demographic Developments in Ottoman Bulgaria*. Washington DC: American University Press, 1993.

-. *Imagining the Balkans*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

-. *Balkan Identities*. London and New York: Hurst and New York University Press, 2004.

Bones of Contention: The Making and Meaning of a National Hero

National heroes are a recognized cornerstone of the symbolic repertoire of nationalism. My present project takes as its narrative focus the life, death and, especially, the posthumous life of what has arguably become the only uncontested Bulgarian hero, Vasil Levski (1835-1873). Through a historical study of the posthumous fate of a hero in the course of a hundred and fifty years, I am concentrating on the symbology of nationalism and the mechanisms of hero worship, in order to understand the particular role of cultural processes and artifacts in the formation of national identity. By exploring the vicissitudes of his heroicization, glorification, consecutive appropriations by different, often opposing political forces, reinterpretation, commemoration and, finally, canonization, the project seeks to engage in several broad theoretical debates, and provide the basis for subsequent regional comparative research. I hope that such analysis would allow us to arrive at more nuanced conclusions about the lately much debated character of Balkan nationalism as well as about the manifestations of nationalism in general, apart from the historical specificity of a particular case.

At another level, the Levski story engages organically in a variety of other general questions. Most broadly, it offers insights into the problem of history and memory, with all its concomitant aspects: the question of public, social or collective memory as treated by historians; the nature of national memory in comparison to other types of memory; its variability over time and social space; alternative memories; memory's techniques like commemorations; the mechanisms of creating and transmitting memory. It also concretely deals with the issue of the sites of production of historical knowledge, their claims and competition. In the past decades Levski's figure was embroiled in several disputes in Bulgarian social life, of which two assumed the shape of mini-scandals. One was the dispute over the unknown remains of Levski, which involved archaeologists, historians, architects and writers. The other scandal was the quarrel between the two patriarchates of the newly split Bulgarian Orthodox church, in which the secessionist church resorted to a legitimizing tool very different from its usual political argumentation: the canonization of Levski in 1996. These controversies assumed the characteristics of what has been defined as social drama, and became a metaphor for professional and political rivalry, an illustration of the great fight over "who owns history."

In engaging the impressive scholarship on nationalism, specifically its modernist and instrumentalist interpretations, I wish to contribute both to problematizing and refining its typology. By drawing on the insights of an authoritative but still small recent literature on national heroes I would like to probe the continuities of hero worship across different time periods. By critically employing recent work on historical memory, I expect to develop a more concrete understanding of how people experience the past, and how the past can mobilize them politically. Finally, by offering a thick description of two specific social dramas, I wish to contribute to a better understanding of the character of late socialism, as well as of post-communism.

Truth and the F-Word, or: Knowledge versus Ideology? On Epistemological Uses of Feminism in the Social and Natural Sciences

PUBLICATIONS FROM THE FELLOW LIBRARY

Todorova, Maria (2010)

Historische Vermächtnisse zwischen Europa und dem Nahen Osten

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1400871603>

Todorova, Maria (New York [u.a.], 2010)

Post-communist nostalgia

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=621420700>

Todorova, Maria (Budapest, 2009)

Bones of contention : the living archive of Vasil Levski and the making of Bulgaria's national hero

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1619413973>

Todorova, Maria (Berlin, 2007)

Historical legacies between Europe and the Near East

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=573734399>

Carl Heinrich Becker lecture der Fritz Thyssen Stiftung ; 1

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=573734399>

Todorova, Maria (2006)

The Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov as lieu de mémoire

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=772599890>

Todorova, Maria (2006)

The Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov as lieu de mémoire

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=771543646>

Todorova, Maria (2006)

Wo liegt Europa? : Von der Einteilung eines Kontinents und seinen historischen Regionen

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=670703648>

Todorova, Maria (Budapest, 2006)

Balkan family structure and the European pattern : demographic developments in Ottoman Bulgaria

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=505527804>

Pasts incorporated: CEU studies in the humanities ; 3

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=505527804>

Todorova, Maria (2005)

The trap of backwardness : modernity, temporality, and the study of eastern European nationalism

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=771545347>

Todorova, Maria (New York, NY, 2004)

Balkan identities : nation and memory

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=669191590>